



The Florida House of Representatives

Interim Project Report

January 6, 2006

Committee on Military & Veteran Affairs

Representative Stan Jordan, Chair

MILITARY AND VETERAN BENEFITS

A STATE TO STATE COMPARISON

PURPOSE:

Military personnel and veterans are eligible for an array of benefits in each of the fifty states in the United States. This report categorizes and catalogs those benefits across the individual states, to provide a backdrop against which to compare the programs and benefits Florida currently offers.

RESEARCH/METHODOLOGY:

Attached to this summary are two extensive tables compiled by Military & Veteran Affairs Committee staff to provide a break down of benefits offered by the various states. The table showing benefits provided to military personnel is current as of this year, and was provided by the National Governors' Association. Committee staff compiled the information for the table on Veteran Benefits by State by contacting the veterans' agency in each state.

The table¹ for military personnel and guard members is divided into six categories of benefits: State Employees, Educational Benefits, Tax and Financial Benefits, Family Support, Licensing and Registration, and Other Support.

The table² for veterans is divided into 8 categories of benefits: Tax/Financial Benefits, Employment Benefits, Education Benefits, License Plates, Nursing Homes/Healthcare, Recreational Benefits, Burial Benefits, and Miscellaneous Benefits.

¹ State and Territorial Support for National Guard and Regular Military Members and their Families, a report by the National Governors Association

² Veteran Benefits by State, a report by the House Committee on Military & Veteran Affairs

The description for each state program is given in-brief in the tables to allow for an across the board comparison. Committee staff is prepared to provide resource contacts if more in depth information on any particular state's programs is desired.

FINDINGS:

There are unique programs throughout the country designed to raise the quality of life for the nation's servicemen and women, and the benefits vary greatly from state to state. All of the states in the study have passed or are working on legislation to assist military and veteran personnel. Some of the benefits provided are unique to the particular states while others are commonplace throughout the country. Most states provide some type of tax (tax or fee deductions) or financial benefit (property tax exemptions) to military personnel and veterans. Many states also provide some form of education benefit (e.g. free tuition or tuition assistance). A number of states also provide some type of burial assistance, generally internment in a state cemetery. The state cemeteries are operated separately from the federal veterans' cemeteries.

Florida provides a wide range of benefits not only to the military personnel, national guardsmen, reservists, and veterans domiciled in the state, but also extends a number of benefits to spouses, dependents, and beneficiaries. For example:

- Florida provides a property tax exemption to veterans in the state. The exemption is \$5,000 to any veteran with a disability of ten percent or more. Most states provide a similar benefit with little variation in the eligibility requirements. However, Florida differs from other states by extending that exemption to the spouse of the deceased veteran.
- Florida provides discounted hunting and fishing licenses to active duty personnel and veterans. Many other states provide discounted licenses or free licenses. Due to the large active duty and veteran populations in Florida it would be cost prohibitive to provide free licenses to all those eligible.
- Florida also provides free tuition to the children of deceased or completely and permanently disabled veterans. Other states provide similar educational benefits, however, few states provide the educational benefits to the spouse of the deceased or disabled veteran.
- Florida also has a unique program that was passed in the 2005 Regular Session. The Family Readiness Program was enacted by HB 1069. This legislation created a fund enabling the Florida Department of Military Affairs to receive applications and give grants to families of guardsmen and reservists. The grants are designed to assist in emergency situations arising from the change in pay due to deployment.

To provide perspective on how Florida lines up in a comparison with other states, it is helpful to take a look at recently enacted legislation affecting military personnel and veterans in this state and in those states that are comparable in size and diversity of population, ability to fund programs beneficial to military personnel, and number of military personnel stationed within their borders. These other states include: California, Texas, New York, and Pennsylvania.

The four states mentioned above all have some programs benefiting military personnel stationed within their borders. The benefits range from discounted hunting and fishing licenses³ to property tax exemptions⁴ to the creation of new state agencies to oversee base protection and community redevelopment⁵. Examples of these can be found in New York and Florida; two states that have passed broad legislative packages to benefit military personnel and veterans. New York passed the Patriot Plan I and II in the years 2003 and 2004 respectively and Florida passed SB 1098 in 2003 and HB 1604 in 2004.

All the states listed above provide some type of educational benefit. California mandates that “school districts give preference to the children of military personnel applying to attend a school outside of their residence.”⁶ Florida provides that military dependent children can be given first preference when they meet the requirements for special academic programs.⁷ Texas HB 503 provides educational benefits already granted to Texas veterans, to veterans of the War on Terror⁸. New York provides tuition and requirement exemptions in the Patriot Plan I and II. Florida and New York provide tuition exemptions to the children of deceased veterans. New York also extends the benefit to the children of severely disabled veterans whose disability is combat related.

Florida and New York have prohibited discrimination against military personnel in rental agreements. Many renters would refuse to rent to military personnel because they were concerned the rental agreement would not be seen to completion due to a change in orders. The Florida Uniformed Service Members Protection Act and the Patriot Plan I in New York expressly prohibit discrimination against military personnel in rental agreements. In relation to rental agreements Florida also provides a right to early termination under certain circumstances of a rental agreement involving military personnel, National Guardsmen or Reservists.

The breadth of Florida’s benefits, when compared to those offered by other states, elevates this state to a very favorable position. This is a particularly notable accomplishment since Florida has one of the largest populations in the country of potentially eligible recipients (1.8 M), making the fiscal impact of each benefit a significant factor for the Legislature to consider when new programs are proposed.

³ Florida, New York and Texas

⁴ Florida and Pennsylvania

⁵ California

⁶ California Assembly AB 208

⁷ Staff Analysis of HB 1604 Appropriations and Comprehensive Planning and Military and Veterans' Affairs, Base Protection, and Spaceports

⁸ Staff analysis of HB 503 by Guillen, House Committee on Veteran Affairs & Military Installations

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The majority of states in the US provide a significant array of benefits to military personnel and veterans. Although many of those benefits may be attractive to Florida, due consideration should be given to the fact that it may be cost prohibitive due to the size of the potentially eligible populations in this state.

The best service Florida may be able to provide to military personnel and veterans would be to assure proper administration and monitoring of current programs, to ensure efficient and effective delivery of benefits.

Please review tables located at the following web site for additional information:

[http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/publications.aspx?CommitteeId=2257&PublicationType=Committees&DocumentType=Interim%20Projects%20\(Reports\)&Session=2006&SessionId=42](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/publications.aspx?CommitteeId=2257&PublicationType=Committees&DocumentType=Interim%20Projects%20(Reports)&Session=2006&SessionId=42)

More specific information on benefits for military personnel, veterans and dependents in Florida may be obtained by contacting the following sites.

Department of Military Affairs
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399
(850) 414-9049

Florida National Guard
<http://www.floridaguard.army.mil/>

Department of Veterans' Affairs
4040 Esplanade Way, Suite 180
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-7 016
(727) 319-7403
<http://www.floridavets.org/>